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NORTH CHICAGO — Construction of a grade level crossing of the Union Pacific/Metra tracks at Martin Luther King Drive to Naval Station Great Lakes is expected to start next week.

The project has been talked about for the past five years over three mayoral administrations and hit scores of snags along the way.

But this week, the City Council awarded a \$3.5 million contract to Alliance Contractors of Woodstock to build the crossing.

The council, Mayor Leon Rockingham, Navy officials and U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk will celebrate the start of the project Monday at a ground-breaking ceremony starting at 10:30 a.m. Monday at the intersection of King Drive and Sheridan Road.

In addition to Kirk and city officials, Rear Adm. Gary R. Jones, commander of Naval Service Training Command/Navy Region Midwest, and Mohammed Saeed, project manager for the U.S. Economic Development Administration, are expected to be on hand.

The city got a \$1.

1 million federal grant for the crossing work and is hoping to get more.

Total cost of the work is expected to be close to \$6 million. New tracks and signals being installed by the Union Pacific Railroad will cost an estimated \$1.5 million. Engineering, legal fees, land acquisition and other costs will add nearly \$1 million.

Alliance's bid for the project was \$4,309,653 but that figure was reduced by \$889,160 after negotiations with Bruce Burris, the city's consulting engineer, and city officials. Alliance was the only bidder for the concrete project, although Burris said concrete contractors in Chicago and Milwaukee were informed.

A detour on a portion of Sheridan Road that runs along the Navy base on the east side of the Union Pacific tracks is scheduled to go into effect on June 19.

Metra commuter rail traffic on the Union Pacific tracks isn't expected to be disrupted by the work, Burris said. "They'll work around the trains," Burris said.